



Director of  
Central  
Intelligence

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*Friday*  
*3 August 1979*

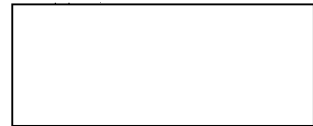
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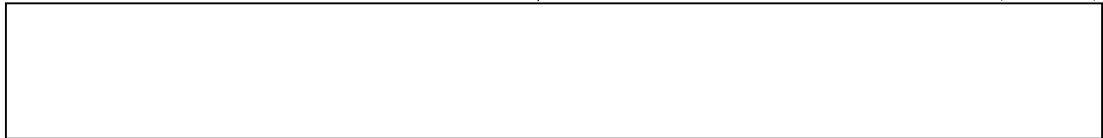
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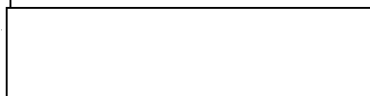
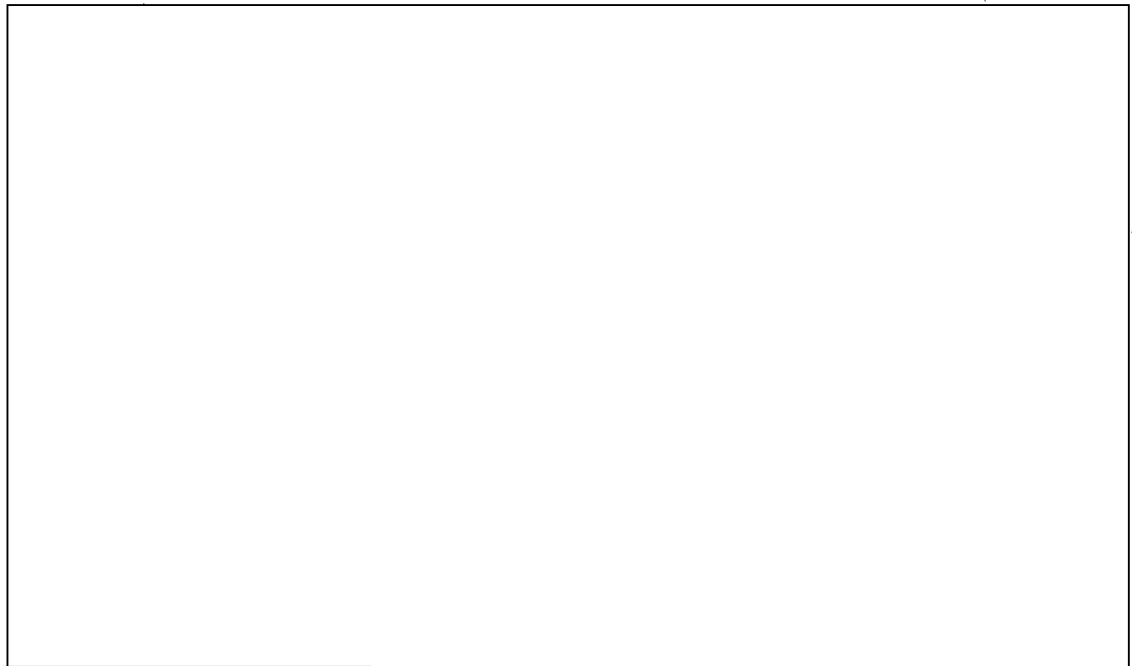
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## Briefs and Comments



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## IRAQ: Political Situation

*Although we do not yet know what touched off the current political turbulence in Iraq, our best estimate is that President Saddam Husayn overreacted to suggestions by others in the leadership that he hold overdue Baath Party elections to legitimize his succession to the presidency. We have no hard evidence pointing to an active plot or coup attempt.* [ ]

Saddam does not appear to have forced former President Bakr to resign, but some senior Baathists used Bakr's retirement to push for elections to the Baath Party regional command that were scheduled for last January. Saddam saw this as a challenge and jailed those pushing for elections. He may now be using the episode as a pretext to remove others in the power structure whose loyalty he doubts. Saddam Husayn seems to have relied heavily during the period of tension on family members, notably his brother Barzan, the acting chief of the intelligence service, and Defense Minister Talfah, his brother-in-law. [ ]

Speculation about Syrian backing for a conspiracy against the regime continues to abound in Baghdad even though the government's official explanation stopped short of accusing the Syrians. A second high-ranking Syrian visited Baghdad, reportedly earlier this week; this was probably a further attempt by Syrian President Assad to assure the Iraqis that he had no contacts with the accused. Some deterioration in bilateral relations seems inevitable. Unless it is arrested, it could disrupt the unified Arab effort to isolate Egyptian President Sadat. [ ]

Saddam reportedly has counseled the special tribunal set up to try the alleged conspirators to be strict with the leading figures but to be discriminating and avoid convicting large numbers on weak evidence. This suggests an awareness that harsh, widespread reprisals could be counterproductive. Saddam also appears to be moving to reduce the potential for a military backlash by having the arrested military officers tried by their peers at a court martial rather than by a civilian tribunal. [ ]

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